

Captain Daniel Holden House
24 Elm Street
Topsham
Sagadahoc County
Maine

HABS No. ME-116

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
801 - 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

CAPTAIN DANIEL HOLDEN HOUSE

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Location: 24 Elm Street, Topsham, Sagadahoc County, Maine.

Present Owner and Occupant: John W. Frost, 40 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York.

Present Use: Summer residence

Statement of
Significance:

This structure is an outstanding example of an early 19th century Maine house. It was probably partially built and decorated, by Samuel Melcher III, carpenter-builder of Brunswick. Melcher was typical of the coastal builders of Maine who were both shipbuilders and housewrights. Of particular interest is the restraint of interior detail, large second-floor ballroom, and the stairways.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners:

c. 1806-12	Daniel Holden
1812-32	Gardner and Nathaniel Green
1832-60	William Frost
1860-75	Warren Johnson
1875-85	People's 25¢ Savings Bank
1885-1909	Humphrey Purinton
1909-17	Fred H. Ward
1917-37	A. H. Beal
1937-	John W. Frost

2. Date of erection: c. 1806

3. Architect: The following paragraph has been extracted from a letter to Professor Green dated September 24, 1964. It was written, in reply to an inquiry regarding a chain of title, by Professor William D. Shipman, who has done research on local historic architecture:

"While [Samuel] Melcher [III] appears not to have had any connection with the original construction of the house, there are a number of entries in Melcher's account books for the 1830's under the name of William Frost. I think it is more than likely that Melcher is responsible for several of the fireplace frames and the central staircase and possibly some other woodworking details. I say this

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on the basis of strictly visual evidence and my own acquaintance with Melcher's work."

4. Notes on original plan and construction of building: See HABS measured drawings (1962).
5. Notes on known alterations and additions: The two-story side addition was built at an undetermined date.

The following information was obtained in July 1962 from Mrs. John W. Frost, wife of the present owner:

In 1938 a number of changes were made under the direction of the Boston architect Felix Burton (deceased). First floor:

Rebuilding of the "secret staircase," and addition of a utility closet near door to stairway.

Billiard room made into service hall; Dutch oven blocked out; addition of all modern cupboards, shelves, and utilities.

Restoration of dining room.

At time of purchase in 1937, the only bathroom in the house was that at the end of the hall; now converted into powder room.

No structural changes made in living room or morning room.

Second floor:

Bathroom built in end of child's bedroom (west side of house).

Small lavatory built in guest room.

By 1937 the ballroom had been divided into two rooms with a bathroom (never connected) between. The ceiling had also been lowered. This ballroom was restored by the architect, who brought a master carpenter from Boston, who used old hand tools. The dumbwaiter, cabinets, bookcases, and window seat were built into the west end of the ballroom.

Steven Frost, a son of the owner, was also responsible for a number of additions and alterations. In 1948 he built the linen closet and dress closet in Mrs. Frost's dressing room. Subsequent to this he also installed the floor length window in the west end of this room. In 1952 he built

the bookcases in the office. At the same time a coat closet was constructed in the west hall.

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B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with Building:

The ballroom was used as the meeting place of the local Masons during the ownerships of Captain Holden and Major Frost. The Franklin School, established by Warren Johnson, was a military academy for boys.

C. Sources of Information: Records, Lincoln County Courthouse, Wiscasset, Maine; Mr. William Frost, son of the present owner, Department of English, University of California at Santa Barbara; Professor William D. Shipman, Department of Economics, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine.

Prepared by Samuel M. Green
Wesleyan University
July 1962
AND
John C. Poppeliers
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
September 1964.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. This structure is a good example of early 19th century town houses. Of particular interest is the restraint of interior detail, large second-floor ballroom, and the stairways.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Technical Description of the Exterior

1. General description: This is a large three-story wooden frame house on the north side of Elm Street facing River-view Cemetery, with the John A. Cone School to the west. It has a hipped roof, cupola, and two red brick chimneys. Part of the short two story wing to the west appears to be an addition. The exterior is clapboarded, except on the south (front) elevation where horizontal matched siding occurs, and on part of the north elevation which is covered with wooden shingles. The exterior walls are painted white, and the wooden louvered shutters are painted black. Overall dimensions are 38'-9" x 50'-9½".

2. Foundations: Low foundation walls faced with 1'-0" x 6'-0" 12-Top granite slabs (hammered finish) to the exterior, backed with 1-brick and field stone; brick foundation walls under stair hall walls, 8" brick partitions, and piers; brick fireplace foundations, with round arch openings; pipe columns (modern). Variety of hewn and sawed beams.
3. Wall construction: Wooden frame, with clapboarding (4'-0" long with lapped horizontal joints, 3 1/4" exposure) and matched horizontal siding on south wall (4 5/8" exposure; 8" baseboard with beveled top edge). Paneled pilasters at corners (except northeast).
4. Stoops: Stone stoop and steps at south entrance. Wooden frame trellis at doorway with flat arch covered with sheet metal. Stone steps or stone and concrete steps at other entrances. Wooden trellis at rear (north) door.
5. Chimneys: Two square red brick chimneys with brick caps, and corbelled courses at each end of cupola.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: South frontispiece: six-panel wooden door; three-light side lights at each side; flat entablature and simple wooden cornice.

West doorway: Eight-panel wooden door; three-light transom; simple entablature and cornice.

Remaining pintles indicate doors that had shutters at one time.

Six-panel rear door (north).
 - b. Windows and shutters: First and second floor windows generally six-over-six light, double hung. Windows in first floor at southwest corner and east wall are triple hung with six lights in each sash (originally six-over-six light, double hung). Third floor windows are eight-over-four light, and east and west elevations have false windows with shutters nailed shut. One single hung, twelve-over-six light round head window is a modern addition. Wooden louvered shutters with mortised and tenon joints and dowel fasteners.
7. Roof: Hipped roof, with asphalt shingles on three-story portion and on two-story wing of house; simple wooden entablature and cornice. The roof covering was originally wooden shingled on wood sheathing. There are metal gutters and down spouts leading to tile drains.

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8. Cupola: Octagonal cupola with flat-pitched roof and wooden and metal finial, bracketed wooden cornice, and paneled wooden entablature. Two six-over-six-light windows on north and south elevations, one six-over-six-light window on east and west elevations; two-over-two-lights at each angled corner.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Full basement under main house is divided by brick partitions, fireplace foundations, and piers. It has concrete, brick, and stone floors. The foundation wall between the main house and portion of wing indicates that the wing is an addition. There is a crawl space under wing.
- b. First floor: Modified central-hall plan with later additions.
- c. Second and third floors: Modified central-hall plan with two-story ballroom (with side gallery) at rear.

2. Stairways:

- a. Central stairways: Open newel right-hand stair, with square tapered newels and square balusters (two per tread). (The intermediate landing gives access to ballroom). The stairway has molded wooden railing, 7 3/4" risers, 9 3/4" tread, simple stringer decoration, and a reeded fascia at edge of second-floor landing. The stairway continues to third floor and attic, narrowing between third floor and attic, and straight run between these levels.
- b. The stairway off side hall is secreted behind a panel wall which is opened by striking sharp blow (spring catch); the solid newel "U"-shaped stair has six winders and no landing, 11" risers, and is continuous to second floor hall and to third floor closet and gallery.

3. Flooring: Wooden floors with some new oak stripping; the boards are painted, covered with painted coarse fabric, plastic tiles and linoleum; hewn floor joists, and sawed beams. A wide wooden board subfloor is visible in basement.

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4. Wall and ceiling finish:

- a. Walls: Plaster walls (on split lath) are papered; wooden board wainscoting 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ " high occurs in all major rooms on the first and second floors.
- b. Ceilings: Plastered. The vaulted ceiling in ballroom has a plaster centerpiece; major rooms have wooden cornices.

5. Doorways and doors: In general the doorways have simple wooden trim and four- and six-paneled wooden doors, with mortise and tenon joints, and dowel fasteners. There are three-panel wooden doors at the secret stair. The doorway to the ballroom has paneled double doors in an arched opening (at ballroom side only). This spandrel is filled with two wooden panels. The ballroom doorway has engaged columns.

6. Trim: Simple wooden mantelpieces, cornices, and wainscot entablatures with triglyphs. The two entry steps to the ballroom have a molded railing with turned newels and balusters; the ballroom gallery also has turned wooden balusters.

7. Hardware: None of major importance. There are brass and glass doorknobs, a pull doorbell at west entrance, and an iron lantern hook in the front hall.

8. Lighting: Modern electric.

9. Heating: There are fireplaces in major rooms, but the house is now heated by a modern hot air system. An iron heating stove in the back hall is marked "Ideal Clarion."

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The house, situated on a terraced hill, and surrounded by elm trees, faces south on Elm Street. There is a dry gulley to the east. The property is partly enclosed by a low fence, with posts at the drive entrance.

2. Outbuildings: Modern garage is at the northwest corner of the house. A barn (not part of complex but purchased by the present owner as a barrier) is to the north.

3. Walks and drive: There is a large circular drive of

crushed stone to the west of the house, and stone
and brick walks.

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4. Landscaping: Peripheral planting of cedar hedges and
elms. Flower beds at north end of yard.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, Architect
National Park Service
July 1962